

“Steady as I Go”

by

Andy Manoloff

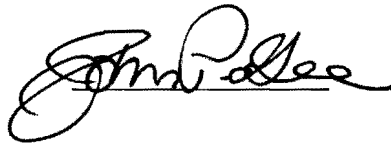
“Steady as I Go”

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

Andy Manoloff

Thesis Advisor
John P. Gee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John P. Gee", written over a horizontal line.

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Artist's Statement

Undecided, An Open Door, and Steady are three pieces of art made to chronicle my journey from a lost, unsteady freshman to the confident and future veterinarian I am today. Each piece marks a different point within this journey, and each has its own subtleties and symbolisms that the viewer can ponder and decipher.

Decisions such as the color of paper used, the posing of me within the format and the background were all made purposefully. Each component of each piece was carefully thought out and deliberately planned either for some symbolic purpose or with some particular message in mind. Undecided is heavily enveloped in shadow, for instance, conveying a lost, somewhat random feel, while Steady is fully lit, showing that I know where I am and what my place is in life. Connecting the two is the half-shadow half-light An Open Door, which helps to symbolize the turning point in my journey.

To create the pieces, the main technique used was pencil drawing on paper with heavy use of a blending stump. Charcoal white pencil was used for the Undecided and half of An Open Door, while ebony graphite was used for Steady and half of the An Open door. As the viewer's eye moves from piece to piece, they will notice an overall change in the shadowing as it changes from heavy and dark to light. The viewer should also notice the changing position of my figure in the frame as it moves from off-centered and chaotic to a more centered, more balanced position. Pay particular attention to the background of Undecided, as there are several key symbolisms that may not at first be readily apparent. In the end all of the pieces combine to form a visual representation of myself and my thoughts as I made my way through my personal journey.

Abstract

Upon arriving at Ball State as a freshman, I felt particularly lost and adrift in terms of what I wanted as my major, and what I wanted to pursue as my career. I had a myriad of possibilities running through my mind at any one time, from Art, to Architecture, Biology to Chemistry. As I became accustomed to the climate of the university world, however, I began taking certain classes that helped me find my identity and what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. In the end, I realized what it was I truly wanted to become, a veterinarian. I felt that I looked at and felt about animals differently than most people, and I wanted to ensure I could do anything in my power to help them. Composed of 3 panels called “Undecided”, “An Open Door”, and “Steady”, this project is meant as a visual chronicle of my journey from a lost, unsteady freshman through exploring opportunities, to the confident and steadfast future veterinarian that I am today.

Acknowledgements

- I would like to thank John Gee for advising me during this project. He always provided good, constructive criticism, and I always took his advice to heart.
- I would like to thank my mother, Pam, for the artistic talent she has bestowed upon me, and my brother, Dan, for providing his insights and helping me hone my skills when we were younger.

Media, technique, and graphical choices

When deciding what types of materials I would use for this project, I decided to stick to what I knew best, paper and pencil for drawing. However, I did go a bit more in

depth than simple sketching paper and pencils. As you can see, the first image is actually on black paper, while the third is on white, and the second is on half black and half white. I decided on this approach before there was ever any drawing done. It should be noted, however, that I did not carry this idea over into the matting of each picture. I decided to keep the mats a uniform color to help keep a consistency amongst the pieces as a whole, as well as to not detract too much from the drawings themselves.

The type of paper chosen was black and white 90 lb. cold press. When cold pressed, the paper retains a toothy, textured look and feel, which I felt allowed for more visual options in terms of imaging and drawing techniques. For example, by using the cold press paper and a blending stump rubbed lightly, I was able to allow the texture to show through for certain things such as clothing. Conversely, by using the blending stump and rubbing firmly I was better able to blend through the texture giving the illusion of something such as smooth skin.

For drawing purposes I chose to use charcoal white when drawing on black paper, and ebony graphite when drawing on white paper. The charcoal white pencil was used because it was very easy to work with in creating smooth, realistic shadows and particularly highlights. Ebony graphite was used on the white paper rather than charcoal because it is less crumbly and messy. It does not push around with a blending stump quite as easily as charcoal, but it is still very workable, and the trade-off between the two in this regard had no impact on my overall technique. Ebony was chosen over regular graphite because it is much darker and richer, yet does not leave the reflective sheen that is typically seen when using other types of graphite.

The general technique for each drawing was fairly straightforward, and only differed slightly when using the charcoal white compared to the ebony graphite. When using the charcoal white, the procedure began with a simple outline of all the major portions of the drawing, meaning the head, shoulders, and general feature positions. From this general outline, I then chose the most prominent feature/structure on the left side of the drawing and worked my way across. This was done to avoid any major smearing of the piece as I progressed. Special attention had to be paid, however, as the charcoal white pencil showed up amazingly well against the black paper. This meant that my pencil strokes and shading had to be done quite a bit more carefully than I would have done conventionally. Due to this fact, the blending stump was used extensively to create the subtle shadows and particularly the faint facial features of the first drawing.

When using the graphite, there was not as much concern that the strokes be made so carefully, although you should never get lax about it. More care had to be paid, however, to the threat of smearing, as the dark ebony simply makes for a large mess and a difficult cleanup if smearing were to occur. There was also a bit less work done with the blending stump alone in creating subtle shadows and facial features. Because the ebony does not smear or push around as well, these subtle shadows and features had to be done mostly with the pencil itself, using the blending stump to merely make the final product look smoother.

Undecided

When I first arrived at Ball State, I entered under the infamously declared “undecided” as my major. In essence, I did not know exactly what it was I wanted to do

with my life at that point in time. To represent my feeling of being lost early in my college career, I decided the first picture would be heavily enveloped in shadow. As you can see in the picture, there is heavy contrast between light and dark, with the shadows predominating over the light. As described in the media and graphical choices, I made the decision to do this drawing on black paper with a charcoal white pencil. Seeing as how this piece is predominantly dark, I felt that the black paper would have a greater impact and help to promote the contrast made by using the charcoal white. To further emphasize the feeling of being lost or unsteady in my outlook on the future, I decided I would not center myself in the format, rather put my image off to one side, as well as tilt it at an angle. Even the pose that I am taking was done purposefully. I have my hands on my head, looking frustrated, feeling alone and vulnerable. I felt that these decisions combined to provide a powerful message that I felt extremely lost, unsteady, and unsure of myself and my future when I first arrived here at Ball State. Even the pose that I am taking was done purposefully. I have my hands on my head, looking frustrated, feeling alone and vulnerable.

Although I felt extremely unsure of what I wanted to do when I first started school, I did have some ideas at the time. The initial reason I decided to attend Ball State was to become either an architect or an art teacher. In addition to my first two possible career choices, I had a love of animals. I was introduced to my first family pet at the age of one, and have never been without one since that day. I worked at a pet store for 3 years throughout high school as well. I chose the wide-open space I left behind my image to represent the idea of all of these thoughts running wildly through my head as I tried to figure out what I wanted to do with my life.

I decided I was going to try to represent my thoughts as random, but not as chaotic, and so I used the lightest of touches to just hint at the idea of images behind me. The look I was striving for was almost of a smoky appearance that could represent the randomness of my thoughts, swirling through my head as I tried to figure out what to do with myself. I also placed hints of images of the thoughts that were actually running through my head. If you look closely, there is an image of a cat just over my right shoulder, a dog over my left, and ever so faintly a horse in the lower right-hand corner. There is a paintbrush within the swirls of the upper left-hand corner of the piece, and finally the swirls themselves form the image, the outline, of a structure, to represent my thought of architecture as a career choice. Each of these “ghost” images were placed to be somewhat hidden, and just barely visible, in order that the viewer hopefully gets the impression that what’s going on in the background is not “real”, per se, but was a part of my mental meanderings.

An Open Door

My second drawing was intended to portray me at the point in time when I started focusing, and realizing what it was that I really wanted to do with my life. Because this piece is meant to be the turning point, to exhibit the greatest change in mind, I decided to do the drawing on black AND white. By doing so, I do not only exhibit the change through the drawing itself, but through the media in which I have chosen to use. Because this is the turning point, and is fairly important, this composition also helps to draw the eye more strongly toward this piece, giving the viewer the idea that it is that much more powerful in its meaning. Unlike the “Undecided”, there are much lighter portions of this

piece. However, there is one major point of contrast, and that is between the darker, left side of the drawing, and the lighter right side (not referring to the paper, but to the contrast within the drawing itself). This was done purposefully to accomplish two goals. By utilizing the major contrast between each specific side, I wanted to drive home the idea of a turning point, or change, even further. On the other hand, by having one side of my face well lit, it gives the impression that I am moving out of the darkness and the uncertainty. Within the frame, I still tilted my image slightly, but the angle is less extreme this time, giving the impression that I am more stable in my thoughts on the future.

At the time represented in this picture, I had been taking many core classes, but also began to take several science courses as well. It was in these classes that I began to realize that it was science that I truly enjoyed. Of course I still enjoyed art and drawing, but I began to realize that I probably was not going to make a career out of art. To represent this in the drawing, I put a simple doorway with the word Biology over the top of it. My goal here was to very bluntly show that I had been taking these sorts of classes, and it was these classes that got me thinking that science and animals were my passion and my future. Within the doorframe, then, I decided to put a dog walking into the classroom. I felt this was necessary so the viewer would be sure that it was animal sciences I was interested in, rather than anything else such as general biology or genetics.

To show that these classes got me thinking, I decided to pose myself for the picture in the classic “thinker” pose, complete with my closed fist resting gently under my chin. However, I decided to be looking up rather than down, as The Thinker actually does. This was done to show, that at this point in time, things literally were looking up

for me, as I was more certain of my future. Lastly, you can see on the left side of the picture faint wisps, such as the ones from Undecided. This was done for two reasons, the first being to help more consistently connect the first drawing to the second. However, the wisps gently fade away as they approach the white half of the drawing, and this was done as yet one more symbol of the turning point being represented by the piece as a whole. Furthermore, their fading out represents the diminishing of the randomness in my thinking, and the fact that I now have a clearer goal in mind.

Steady

The final drawing is meant to help wrap up my thematic concept and exhibit what I have finally decided to do with my life. After the science courses, and jobs ranging from a keeper at the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo to a tech at a veterinary hospital, I have made the decision I want to work with animals, specifically in a veterinary field. I applied to Purdue University School of Veterinary Medicine, and was accepted. The first thing to be noticed in this drawing is the minimal amount of shadow present. I chose to include more light in the last drawing to represent that I am now out of the confusion and uncertainty, and am fully in the light, knowing what I want to do and where I want to go. This drawing was done on white paper as well, which helps emphasize the increased light and bring home even more clearly the message I was trying to convey

My pose in this drawing was another important factor in trying to communicate my message. Here I am posed looking directly out, a slight smile on my face, my weight gently resting on my hand. I posed this way in an attempt to show an air of confidence, something I didn't have when I first arrived at Ball State. By looking straight out I was

also trying to get the point across that I am looking forward to the future now, ready for anything that may come my way. It is interesting that when a portrait is done where the subject is looking straight out, no matter where the viewer is standing it will look as though the subject is looking in that direction. This helps to further emphasize my point, no matter where the viewer happens to be standing. It should also be noted that I am wearing a watch in the last piece, where I am not wearing one in either of the two previous pieces. This was done purposefully to somewhat symbolize that I now know where I am in the grand scheme of my life. I know what I want to do, how to do it, and when I should be done.

The background in this final piece is probably the simplest and most straightforward in its' meaning compared to the backgrounds in each of the previous pieces. I wanted to be sure the viewer knew that I was confident in myself in my career choice as a veterinarian. I decided, then, to give the impression of posters behind me that you might encounter at the vet on a typical visit. The poster on the left side is meant to be a poster of signs of aging, while the one on the right is meant to be a poster of proper coat maintenance for your pet. There is no special meaning behind this background, it is simply meant to ensure that the viewer knows my career outlook is in the veterinary field. Being an artist, I simply could not resist putting in some of those personal touches that are only meant for me. With this in mind, the two dogs in the posters are my pets from home, and I just felt the need to fit them into my project the best I could.